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N. Vietnam in ruins:

By James H. Bowman
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The Rev. William Sloane Coffin Jr. walked through Nam Dinh, a town 50 miles south of Hanoi, during his recent trip to North Vietnam. He saw two houses left standing.

U.S. bombing had levelled the rest in the community of 50,000, he said. One of the two houses left was the local military headquarters.

This and other observations were reported here this week by the Yale University chaplain and peace activist to show that American bombs hit civilian targets and even sometimes miss military ones.

HIS COMMENTARY was in marked opposition to that reported in The Daily News a week ago by the Rev. John McLaughlin S.J., a White House speechwriter and aide.

Father McLaughlin, once unsuccessful Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate from Rhode Island, said U.S. bombers "assiduously avoid civilian targets."

He said civilian deaths by bombing in North Vietnam totalled less than 1,800 since March — compared with the 15,000 who died because of the North Vietnamese invasion of the South in that same period.

MR. COFFIN, on the other hand, said he saw hospitals and churches destroyed in North Vietnam, which he visited in order to escort three American prisoners back home.

"Only one city is left, Hanoi," Mr. Coffin said. "All else is in ruins. One raid alone on Haiphong caused 1,000 civilian deaths."

He said Haiphong was "carpet-bombed twice" on this raid — a charge Father McLaughlin flatly denied. Carpet-bombing was followed by "antipersonnel bombs" which "got the survivors," he said.

He said he saw a church gut-

Rev. Coffin

third largest city, which was 75 per cent destroyed. In front of the ruins was a statue of the Blessed Virgin ironically titled "Regina Pacis" — Queen of Peace.

FATHER McLAUGHLIN defended the bombing of the North as necessary to destroy supplies needed for the invasion of the South.

But this bombing made almost no difference, Mr. Coffin said, because North Vietnamese supplies were "strung out" in long supply routes, rather than concentrated in warehouses.

"There was nothing to bomb," Mr. Coffin said. "It was a senseless mess. Four hundred churches were wiped out, including almost all the Catholic ones."

He said he asked Catholics and Buddhists why Catholic churches were so hard hit, and they told him it was probably because of the "naive" U.S. conviction that Catholics don't support Hanoi and would be more angry than ever at the Hanoi regime for inviting such attacks.

IN 1956, he said, when "the Virgin went south" and thousands of Catholics "voted with their feet" against the Communist regime, 30 per cent of the land was owned by the Catholic church.

"The bishops went south," Mr. Coffin said, together with others who stood to suffer from land-reform measures taken, sometimes brutally, by the Communists.

Mr. Coffin admitted that the U.S. bombing in the South "slowed the invasion" and prevented the collapse of the Saigon regime.

He said the Hanoi regime runs "the worst police state in the world," but

"one guard" standing before the Hanoi premier's residence in that city.

"HOW DO YOU explain the morale of the North Vietnamese army (if the Hanoi government is so repressive)?" he asked, "or the CIA's failure to get intelligence from it or subvert the Hanoi regime?"

He admitted that there is no opposition press or political party in the North and he foresaw "problems in the future" when the present national unity "in the face of the invader (the U.S.)" is no longer present.

Father McLaughlin predicted that a "bloodbath" of between 500,000 and 1,000,000 deaths would follow a Communist take-over in the south.

"Why? Whose ends would it serve?" asked Mr. Coffin. He said bloodbath estimates have been based largely on conflicting reports of numbers killed in the North in 1956 during a land reform.

FATHER McLAUGHLIN predicted "minor programs" after a cease-fire under any circumstances, and Mr. Coffin also sees a kind of bloodbath in the South after the fall of the present Saigon regime.

Revenge against President Nguyen Van Thieu's own his-

tory of repression is inevitable, he said, "once Thieu is reunited with his bank account" and his "brittle basis of power" is destroyed.